



# COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

1320 NORTH EASTERN AVENUE  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90063-3294  
(323) 881-2401

DARYL L. OSBY  
FIRE CHIEF  
FORESTER & FIRE WARDEN

March 26, 2013

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: DARYL L. OSBY, FIRE CHIEF

### **UPDATE ON UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE'S NEW DEFENSIBLE SPACE POLICY AND EXPANDED NIGHTTIME AERIAL FIREFIGHTING PROGRAM**

This is an update to the memorandum to your Honorable Board dated May 29, 2012, regarding the United States Government Accountability Office report titled, "Station Fire: Forest Service's Response Offers Potential Lessons for Future Wildland Fire Management." The following update outlines the United States Forest Service's (USFS) progress as of March 1, 2013, regarding implementation of a new Defensible Space Policy for the Angeles National Forest (ANF) and the expanded nighttime aerial firefighting program.

#### **Defensible Space Policy**

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act, the ANF is continuing preparation of a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) on proposed increased brush clearance activity from 30 feet to 100 feet, and up to 200 feet in extra hazardous areas. The ANF is scheduled to complete and release the draft EA to the public in July 2013. Once the Defensible Space Policy draft EA is released to the public, there will be a 30-day comment period. Based on recommendations from the public, the ANF Supervisor will issue a Final Decision Document. Adoption of the new defensible space policy is expected by late 2013.

The increased defensible space clearance around all structures in the Mount Wilson area is expected to last an additional two to four years with clearance activities being conducted by both Los Angeles County Fire Department camp crews and private vendors hired by the ANF. County crews have completed an additional six acres of brush clearance on private non-Federal parcels in steep difficult terrain requiring 214 hours of hand labor.

The ANF, working with private contractors, has also made progress in creating increased defensible space around structures on Federally owned land. Exact acreage completed is unknown at this time.

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PARAMOUNT  
PICO RIVERA

POMONA  
RANCHO PALOS VERDES  
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ROLLING HILLS ESTATES  
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### **Aerial Fire Suppression Methodologies**

Beginning in June 2013, the USFS will be staffing a Type II (medium-sized) firefighting helicopter based out of Air Force Plant 42 in the Antelope Valley, capable of day and night aerial firefighting operations. This helicopter will be available to the ANF, as well as other surrounding forests, and has similar capabilities as the Department's six (6) Bell 412 helicopters. Its primary "nighttime" mission will be water dropping in support of perimeter control operations aimed at early suppression of wildland fires that start during hours of darkness. The USFS helicopter crews will be aided through the use of the latest Night Vision Goggle (NVG) technology.

Additionally, a fixed wing air attack platform will be based out of Riverside with the availability to assist in nighttime firefighting coordination on USFS lands. This, in addition to the continued nighttime aerial firefighting support that our Department provides the ANF in the initial action zone, will further enhance Federal firefighting capabilities in the lands surrounding the communities we serve.

Since accepting the FIREScope<sup>1</sup> nighttime firefighting guidelines, which were primarily developed by Los Angeles County Fire Department, the USFS has continued to make strides in support of further enhancing their ability to save lives, protect property, and minimize fire suppression costs. Furthermore, we will establish unified command and utilize our resources in any emergency incident that originates in the ANF that has direct and/or indirect impact to the County.

I will continue to closely monitor ANF's progress and brief you as appropriate.  
If you have any questions, please contact me at (323) 881-6180.

DLO:jbt

#### **Attachments**

c: William T Fujioka  
Brence Culp  
Georgia Mattera  
Sergio Vasquez  
Jorge Morales  
Randi Tahara  
Joseph Charney  
Susan Nissman  
Rick Velasquez  
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<sup>1</sup> FIREScope (Firefighting Resources of California Organized for Potential Emergencies), is a statewide program represented by local, rural, and metropolitan fire departments, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and Federal fire agencies, which was established to unify the various fire agencies into one voice and direction.



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DARYL L. OSBY  
FIRE CHIEF  
FORESTER & FIRE WARDEN

May 29, 2012

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: DARYL L. OSBY, FIRE CHIEF *Daryl L. Osby*

### U. S. FOREST SERVICE'S NEW DEFENSIBLE SPACE POLICY UPDATE

This communique serves as a follow-up to the Department's memo to your Honorable Board dated February 14, 2012, regarding the U.S. Government Accountability Office report titled, "Station Fire: Forest Service's Response Offers Potential Lessons for Future Wildland Fire Management." In addition, this memo provides information regarding reforestation efforts. The following update outlines the U.S. Forest Service's progress on implementation of a new Defensible Space Policy for the Angeles National Forest (ANF).

#### Defensible Space Requirements

As required by the National Environmental Policy Act, the ANF is preparing a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) on proposed increase of defensible space adjacent to structures from 30 feet to 100 feet, and up to 200 feet in extra hazardous areas. Completion of the Defensible Space draft EA is pending. Once the Defensible Space Policy draft EA is released to the public there will be a 45-day comment period. Based on recommendations from the public, the ANF Supervisor will then issue a Final Decision Document. Adoption of the new Defensible Space Policy is expected by early 2013. This new Defensible Space Policy will be enforced around all privately owned and leased structures within and adjacent to the ANF.

In May of 2010, the ANF completed a separate EA that specifically addressed increasing the defensible space around all communication equipment and structures in the Mount Wilson area from 100 feet to 300 feet. Defensible space clearance in the Mount Wilson area is expected to take at least three to five years with clearance activities being

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Each Supervisor  
May 29, 2012  
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conducted by both our Department's camp crews and private vendors hired by the ANF. Since the beginning of 2012, our Department's camp crews have treated 13 acres. Additionally, the ANF awarded two (2) contracts to private vendors to treat 160 acres around the structures on federal land. Due to the presence of Spotted Owls, the ANF has stopped the work in the Mount Wilson area. The work will resume on August 15, 2012, at the end of the nesting season.

The ANF is in the process of securing additional funding to clear roadside hazardous brush along the Mount Disappointment and West Fork roads. All defensible space work in the Mount Wilson area is expected to be completed by 2015.

#### **Reforestation Efforts**

Members of the Department's Forestry Division have been in contact with ANF Supervisor Tom Contreras and he expressed a great deal of interest in using the County's expertise to enhance future reforestation work. County Foresters will soon be meeting with Supervisor Contreras and other Forest Service experts to review methods, procedures, and practices that will enhance additional reforestation efforts.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (323) 881-6180, or have your staff contact Frank Vidales, Acting Chief, Forestry Division, at (323) 890-4330.

DLO:yh

c: William T Fujloka  
Brence Culp  
Georgia Mattera  
Sergio Vasquez  
Michele Cervera  
Randi Tahara  
Joseph Charney  
Susan Nissman  
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DARYL L. OSBY  
FIRE CHIEF  
FORESTER & FIRE WARDEN

February 14, 2012

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: DARYL L. OSBY, FIRE CHIEF *DLO*

### **U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE REPORT - STATION FIRE: FOREST SERVICE'S RESPONSE OFFERS POTENTIAL LESSONS FOR FUTURE WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT**

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released their report titled, "Station Fire: Forest Service's Response Offers Potential Lessons for Future Wildland Fire Management." The purpose of this memorandum is to provide your Honorable Board with a summary of the report only as it relates to a status of the recommendations in your five-signature letter regarding wildfire management protocols, dated January 5, 2010 (attached).

#### **Brush Clearance Requirements**

The GAO report states that according to fire officials, the Station Fire highlighted the importance of maintaining defensible space around structures in high-risk areas. The report also identifies the importance of having an action plan to protect critical communications and other infrastructure on Mt. Wilson. Additionally, the report recognizes the following items that have been implemented since the Station Fire:

- The Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Region issued a memorandum increasing the minimum requirement for defensible space around structures within and adjacent to national forests from 30 feet to 100 feet.
- The Forest Service has decided to allow 300 feet of defensible space around the communications infrastructure and the Mt. Wilson observatory.

#### **Fire Suppression Methodologies**

The GAO report states, "The Station Fire exemplifies a situation where using night-flying aircraft may allow the Forest Service to suppress a fire before it escapes efforts to contain it." The report then recognizes the implementation of the following items:

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- The Forest Service changed its night-flying policy to authorize the use of specific night-flying aircraft.
  - Note: The Department updated its agreement with the Forest Service to clarify circumstances under which Department night-flying helicopters may be used.
- The Forest Service began a nationwide assessment of the agency's night-flying operations.

The GAO report makes the following recommendations:

- The Forest Service should clarify when it expects agency firefighting resources to be used instead of assets from other sources.
- The Forest Service should document the steps it plans to take in response to the lessons identified in its review of the Station Fire.

The GAO Report regarding the Station Fire can be viewed by accessing the following website: <http://gao.gov/assets/590/587075.pdf>.

In conclusion, the Department's revised agreement with the Forest Service expands the scope for night-flying helicopters by eliminating the previous restrictions, and if needed, allows for the use of the Department's leased CL-415 SuperScoopers. Also, the Department will continue to monitor any progress the Forest Service is making regarding brush clearance and defensible space, and will provide you with an update in 90 days.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (323) 881-6180.

DLO:jc

Attachment

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SACHI A. HAMAI  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

## COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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January 5, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Los Angeles County's many local jurisdictions contiguous to the Angeles National Forest present challenges to fire officials when it comes to wildfire prevention and suppression. The recent massive and destructive Station Fire within and adjacent to the Angeles National Forest cost local taxpayers \$89 million to fight and millions more in infrastructure recovery costs. Tragically, two Los Angeles County firefighters, Fire Captain Ted Hall and Fire Fighter Specialist Arnie Quinones, lost their lives trying to protect their fire suppression camp headquarters during the fifth day of this fire. The Station Fire graphically spotlights differences in policy which need to be addressed now before the next fire season.

History shows that fire behavior does not respect the value of properties or jurisdictional boundaries, yet there are different fire prevention and fire suppression policies in effect today for national forests. These differences complicate and confuse our ability to provide fire and life safety in and adjacent to the Angeles National Forest. These differences create an even greater wildfire threat to structures within and outside of the forest, and increase every responding agency's costs. Since the Angeles National Forest is the responsibility of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, United States Forest Service, we, as the governing body of Los Angeles County, are asking for your support for changes to current Federal policies which govern the Angeles National Forest and its local officials.

Although the Angeles National Forest is only one of many national forests, its proximity to highly populated urban areas calls for a vastly modified approach to fire prevention and fire response so that a seamless approach exists. As members of the Board of Supervisors, we believe that it is our duty to propose the following policy changes to the current wildfire management protocols in order to help prevent any further loss of human life and property.

We outline the major differences and recommend the following solutions to help bridge these conflicting agency policies:

#### Different Brush Clearance Requirements

Differences:

- a) Within the Angeles National Forest, brush clearance, the distance of cleared land from the structure to natural vegetation, is limited to 30 feet. By contrast, clearance should be 200 feet from the structure to natural vegetation, as required on certain properties outside of the Angeles National Forest.
- b) Various ridge top communication sites (towers and structures) are extremely vulnerable to a wildland fire because of 30-foot clearance and steep terrain. This vulnerability includes Mt. Wilson, Mt. Disappointment, Mt. Lukens and others, all which provide critical wireless communication coverage for the entire Los Angeles Basin area and beyond.

Recommendations:

- a) Direct the Angeles National Forest to enact and enforce brush clearance distance of 200 feet from all structures within and adjacent to the forest where such clearance encroaches on the forest.
- b) Expand clearance to at least 200 feet as recommended above.
- c) Engage fire protection engineers to develop and apply a fire-resistive ground cover material, creating a buffer zone surrounding such installations to protect them from flames, heat, and flying embers.
- d) Provide incentives for communication/observatory/museum owners to "harden" existing structures to make them fire-resistive (per Los Angeles County Fire Department codes and regulations applicable to the Santa Monica Mountain area).

#### Different Fire Suppression Methodologies

Difference:

- a) U.S. Forest Service fire suppression policies limit timing and scope in the use of State and local government personnel, equipment and aircraft for early attack and suppression of fires within the Angeles National Forest. These policies have created a fire suppression paradigm that must be changed, especially in forests near major population areas, such as the Angeles National Forest.

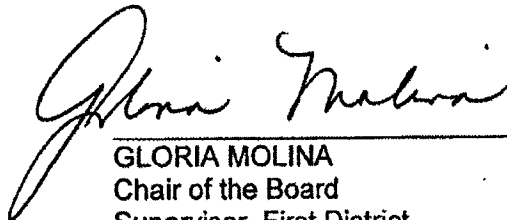


Recommendations:

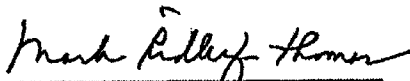
- a) Allow the Angeles National Forest to enter into operating agreements that provide for seamless, as needed, utilization of all federal, State and local fire suppression personnel, equipment and aircraft for any and all fires occurring within the Angeles National Forest (not just Mutual Threat Zones). This would include night flying, use of Super Scoopers and all other equipment and techniques most readily available to effect rapid knockdown and control of all fires.
- b) Modify all existing Wilderness Area legislation to assure that any and all fire suppression equipment and techniques can be applied at the discretion of the fire incident commander without a telephone call seeking permission first.
- c) Direct the creation of an equitable cost apportionment formula between U.S. Forest Service, State, and local government to assure best available fire suppression resources are utilized to effect rapid knockdown and control of fires occurring within the Angeles National Forest.

Clearly, the Station Fire has demonstrated that, while we cannot control the inconceivable actions of an arsonist, we can control and refine an effective wildland fire protection and suppression policy that works in Los Angeles County's unique geographic configuration in order to save life, protect property, and minimize fire suppression costs.

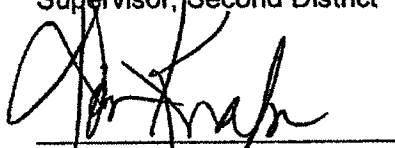
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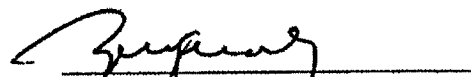
GLORIA MOLINA  
Chair of the Board  
Supervisor, First District



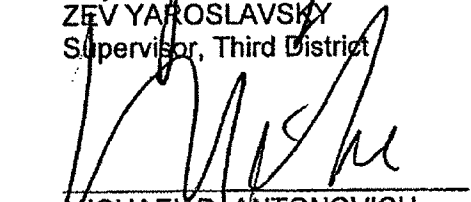
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